

***Remarks***

Reconsideration of this Application is respectfully requested.

Upon entry of the foregoing amendment, claims 1-6 and 22-26 are pending in the application, with claims 1 and 22 being the independent claims.

Based on the above amendment and the following remarks, Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider all outstanding objections and rejections and that they be withdrawn.

***Interview summary***

Applicants thank the Examiner for the courtesies extended to Applicants' representative, John T. Haran, during the telephonic interview of January 16, 2008. Applicants' representative discussed the obviousness rejection of claims 22-26 and provided an English translation of JP 04-171346. It was discussed how the translation indicated that JP 04-171346 did not teach all the claimed features and that it would not have been obvious to combine the disclosure of U.S. Patent No. 6,419,041 to Nemoto with JP 04-171346. Applicants' arguments are discussed in detail below. The Examiner indicated the arguments likely overcame the rejection, but that he would need to consider it further upon receiving Applicants' arguments in writing.

***Allowable subject matter***

Applicants thank the Examiner for allowing claims 1-6.

***Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 112***

Claims 22-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as allegedly being indefinite. Claim 22 is amended herein to change "a transmission shaft" to - - transmission shafts - -. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the rejection be withdrawn.

***Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 103***

Claims 22-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly unpatentable over JP 04-171346 in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,419,041 to Nemoto. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

It is noted that an English translation of JP 04-171346 is provided herein.

Claim 22 calls for a frame structure of a vehicle comprising a flywheel housing, an intermediate housing and a transmission case that are connected to each other along a longitudinal axis of a vehicle to constitute a vehicle frame. Claim 22 recites an intermediate housing having:

a flange portion that is located at a first end of said hollow body portion, said flange portion having an abutting surface against which said second end of the flywheel housing abuts, a support surface that is located radially inwardly of said abutting surface so as to support said forward/rearward movement switching unit.

Claim 22 further recites:

said flange portion has an upper extension extending from a top wall of said hollow body portion towards an upper side of said hollow body portion, a lateral extension extending from a lateral wall of said hollow body portion towards a radially outer side and inner side of said hollow

body portion and a lower extension extending from a bottom wall of said hollow body portion towards the upper side of said hollow body portion so as to define said abutting surface, said supporting surface and said first-end opening, thereby connecting said flywheel housing and said intermediate housing to each other in a state in which a center axis position of said hollow body portion is displaced vertically downward from a center axis position of said flywheel housing.

The cited prior art fails to suggest the claimed invention.

JP 04-171346 discloses a clutch housing (1) having a flywheel (15) located therein and having a rear end surface (2). A bearing case (8), that may be provided therein with a reverse device (49), is connected to rear end surface (2) of clutch housing (1). A connecting housing (9) has a front end surface also fastened to rear end surface (2) of clutch housing (1) such that connecting housing (9) surrounds an outer peripheral portion of bearing case (8). See Fig. 2 and pages 4 and 7 of the English translation. There is no disclosure or suggestion of an intermediate portion that has a flange portion, said flange portion having an abutting surface against which said second end of the flywheel housing abuts and a support surface that is located radially inwardly of said abutting surface so as to support said forward/rearward movement switching unit. Rather, the bearing case (8), which has a reverse device (49) provide therein, is connected to the clutch housing (1) and not to the connecting housing (9). Furthermore, there is no disclosure or suggestion that the connecting housing (9) has a flange with the claimed features noted above. In addition, there is no disclosure or suggestion in JP 04-171346 that the connecting housing (9) constitutes part of a vehicle frame as it is only described as a sheet plate. See English translation, p. 5, line 5. JP 04-171346 fails to disclose or suggest the claimed invention.

Assuming *arguendo* that Nemoto discloses an intermediate housing with the claimed flange portion and supporting a forward/rearward movement switching unit on a support surface of the flange portion of the intermediate housing, there is no suggestion or rationale to modify the arrangement of JP 04-171436 as suggested by the Examiner. There is no suggestion or rationale to remove the bearing case of JP 04-171436, modify the connecting housing to have the claimed flange portion, and support the reverse device on a support surface of the connecting housing.

Accordingly, for at least the reasons noted above, claim 22, and claims 23-26 that depend therefrom, are patentable. Applicants respectfully request that the rejection be withdrawn and the claims allowed.

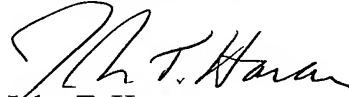
### ***Conclusion***

All of the stated grounds of objection and rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicants therefore respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider all presently outstanding objections and rejections and that they be withdrawn. Applicants believe that a full and complete reply has been made to the outstanding Office Action and, as such, the present application is in condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes, for any reason, that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number provided.

Prompt and favorable consideration of this Amendment and Reply is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

STERNE, KESSLER, GOLDSTEIN & FOX P.L.L.C.



John T. Haran  
Attorney for Applicants  
Registration No. 58,010

Date: 1/18/08

1100 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005-3934  
(202) 371-2600  
770108